



ESSAY EXAMPLES

ESSAY #1 - Santería

Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

In her cramped kitchen, Titi Nana cracked the egg in the center of the pan, the cheeriness of the bright yellow yolk contrasting the harshness of the caldero. In a flourish, she jerked the bottle of alcohol in her hand, flames erupting from the griddle. She instructed me: "Wipe it all off," gesturing to dust off my shoulders and arms into the inferno. I laughed nervously as I removed the *maldad* [evil] from my body, one brush at a time.

I left Titi's apartment that day confused about how our family's practice of Santería [witchcraft] fit in with my outward embrace of my heritage. I felt as if the parts of my Latina identity I claimed openly -- dancing salsa to Celia Cruz or enjoying *lechón y arroz con habichuelas en Navidad*-- were contradicted by my skepticism towards Titi's rituals. My experience with Santería wasn't new, as proven by my mother's kitchen altar lit dimly by prayer candles and adorned with evil eyes, statues of San Miguel, and offerings to Elegua; however, I'd never before witnessed such a tangible demonstration of my family's ritualistic beliefs. Although it surrounded me, I refused to believe in the effects of Santería... so I shunned it entirely.

Moving to a predominantly white boarding school and away from the rituals my family had passed down, I avoided addressing the distance I had wedged between myself and my background. I pushed away all things Latina as my fear of failing to honor my Puerto Rican heritage intensified. This distance only grew as my classmates jokingly commented on my inability to speak Spanish and my white-passing complexion, further tearing away bits of my Latinidad with each snide remark.

In an effort to build myself back up, I began to practice the small bits of Santería that I comprehended: lighting candles for good luck, placing a chalice of water by my bedside to absorb all *maldad*, and saying my prayers to San Miguel and my guardian angels each day. To my disbelief, the comments that attacked my Latinidad, or lack thereof, faded along with the aching feeling that I had failed to represent my



heritage. As I embraced the rituals that I initially renounced, I finally realized the power in Titi's practices. In all of her cleansing and prayer rituals, she was protecting me and our family, opening the doors for us to achieve our goals and overcome the negativity that once held us back. In realizing the potential of Santería, I shifted my practices to actively protecting myself and others against adversity and employed Santería as a solution for the injustice I witnessed in my community.

Santería once served as my scapegoat; I blamed the discomfort I felt towards black magic for the imposter syndrome festering inside me. Until I embraced Santería, it only served as a reminder that I wasn't Latina enough in the eyes of my peers. Now, I understand that while intangible, ethereal, even, the magic of Santería is real; it's the strength of my belief in myself, in my culture, and in my commitment to protect others.



ESSAY #2 - Suburban vs Urban schools

Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma-anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.

They talked about the past, but never the present. In my suburban schools, they talked about Martin Luther King Jr., and Harriet Tubman, and Rosa Parks, but for some reason, not Malik el-Shabazz. I use his chosen name because that's probably what he would've wanted and because Malcolm X was mentioned in passing. My ancestors had their own struggles with white people, but no generational impact that holds a light to American slavery. My parents come from a land I only know by name and the stories they tell, and whatever I can gather from Google Maps. While I am African, I mentally distanced myself from true African-Americans; I did not deserve pity for the unspeakable horrors, nor praise for their strength and hope in face of them. In my school, there were barely ever any black kids in my class, and no true African-Americans, so I was the sole focus during lessons on Blackness, where they'd look at me, or avoid eye contact. It wasn't until I transferred to an inner-city high school that I saw the truth. It wasn't until I went from the blue and glass monsters that rose out of the ground like mountains in my suburban high school, to the small brick building with gated windows in Boston, that I realized there were schools 20 miles away with mostly kids of color. They were not that different from kids in the suburbs, except for their choices.

I moved in with my dad in Boston, transferring to a small school in the city. In three months at my suburban high school, through a rotating schedule in a labyrinth of opportunities, I needed my schedule every day. On my 3rd day at my Boston school, I knew exactly where to go. For the first time, my schedule was given, not created. The gated windows intimidated me on my first day, and I thought the kids would be crazy or "hood". What I really discovered was a lot more of them looked like me. There were over 200 students at this school, almost entirely students of color, and a majority white staff. There were no real electives and only one language available at the school. I had to go back a year in math because the system wasn't designed for students ahead in other districts. We didn't even have a full-time nurse. Students take public transportation, and kids from three different schools had to fit on buses that fit 38 people. Some bus drivers did not care enough to get every student on board. The ones that did broke federal guidelines. For lunch, every student in Boston is qualified for free meals, a fact frequently thrown around like an accomplishment, but in truth, the lunch is worse than prison food. I've seen kids search for seconds of this stuff, while students in the suburbs complain about "limited" choices.



So, what's the difference between inner-city schools and suburban ones? Well, it's a series of simple decisions, compounded into disastrous circumstances. I'm afraid the real question is, what's the difference between inner-city kids and suburban ones? The only difference I've seen is that most suburban kids look like the founding fathers we learn about in class, and most of the inner-city kids look like the slaves they bought and bruised. My experience at three vastly different high schools has shown me these problems in educational disparity are closer to home than we think, a crucial misstep in correcting the wrongs of this country. These experiences have given me a unique perspective, and a responsibility to act. I'm planning a protest when schools open back up, which is undefined. There are solutions to these problems, but inaction perpetuates. As King once said, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." Almost 70 years after Brown v. Board of Education, equality hasn't been achieved, so we'll fight to achieve it.



ESSAY #3 - Friday Night Concerts

Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

During my sophomore year, my dad and I established a Friday after-school ritual. My 90-minute commutes home from school are normally devoted to studying, but Fridays are reserved for listening to music with him. We alternate picking songs: a shared favorite or something new. These long car rides sparked my curiosity in music.

I began reading books about our favorite artists and roaming Spotify for hours, listening to a variety of new songs. My playlist ranged from The Beatles and Queen to Ella Fitzgerald, Debussy, and even Montserrat Caball. Most nights I lie in bed with headphones. Music is not background noise, but an immersive experience. I love to let the melody overtake me, to have the volume so high that I can hear every lyric, every crack and nuance in the singer's voice.

One night I was listening to Bohemian Rhapsody, completely captivated. I loved how the melody made me feel--thrilled yet distressed. I craved more. I wanted to participate, to obtain what felt like magic. So I hurried downstairs to our home piano -- an ancient Costco keyboard missing half the keys. I'd never played before, but was determined to learn the song. I first relied on Youtube videos, and soon progressed to other songs using just my ear. My parents, with enough convincing, agreed to buy me a used piano.

So my dad and I were back in the car. One bleak winter night, we pulled into a gravel driveway, the parking lot of an aging, shack-like store. My dad glanced over at me, raising his eyebrows. "I'll go in first."

The door creaked open, revealing a glossy black piano. It stood directly in the center of the room, twinkling, bathing in the blinding ceiling lights. I rushed to the piano, running my hands along the ivories, feeling their weight push against mine--oh the magic of a full set of keys!

It wasn't long before I released the full potential of my weight, striking the first chord to Bohemian Rhapsody. Rich, smooth notes poured out from the piano, swirling through the air in bursts of color. They rushed through me, lit up my eyes, tugged at my heart, until I was completely consumed in their bright, pulsing waves.



I used to think grades were an estimation of my self-worth; I thought fixating on them would fulfill me, when, really, I was unhappy. Music brings me balance and joy. I love escaping through songs and fully absorbing the artists' pain or excitement. Playing the piano makes these emotions tangible, and it's empowering and liberating. It gives me something else to challenge and identify myself with. It gives me another source of fulfillment, one that's even more rewarding, because I pursue it independently.

I practice for hours every day, perhaps to the annoyance of my family. But I know they're proud, especially my dad. He's never one to shower me with compliments, nor belt along behind me at the piano. But I feel his pride when he blurts, "You should learn this song" in the car, or when he prompts me to play at holiday parties, his beaming reflection in the piano's lacquer.

I'm proud of myself, too. I don't know exactly what I want to do with my love for music or piano. I don't fancy myself as a concert pianist, nor do I strive to become one. I play for the feeling. I'll never tire of completing a song, when my heart sings and my eyes start to swim, because every note, every beautiful wash of color, I earned myself.



ESSAY #4 - Three-Headed Monster in ELA Class

Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

I was sitting at my desk in freshman ELA class, as confident as America's Top Model walking down the runway. It was the end of class and I was excited to see how well I did on the first quiz of the year. My eyes were stalking my teacher as he walked through the aisles, passing back the quizzes. As was the case growing up, I couldn't wait for my teacher to put my quiz on my desk so I could flip it over for the world to see my A. Finally, the moment arrived. I flipped over the paper, expecting fireworks and confetti to come down when I locked my eyes on my grade. The only problem was that there was no A in sight.

All my life, I've felt pressure to achieve the highest grades to honor my mom's sacrifice. She walked away from everything she knew in the Dominican Republic so that we could immigrate to the United States when I was nine. Her goal was for me to receive a better education and have more opportunities. Getting below an A meant that I wasn't trying hard enough and that my mom sacrificed in vain. The pressure from my mom was so consuming that my perception of a successful education was entirely defined by grades. My most efficient strategy for earning A's was memorizing what my teachers taught me and spitting it back out on tests. Since this strategy was so effective, there was no need worrying whether I learned the material or not. I was getting great grades and my mom was pleased, so I was content.

I stared at the C at the top of the quiz like a three-headed monster. My world was crashing down. My first thought, which I quickly dismissed, was that I needed to transfer. However, I'm not the type of person to run from a challenge. I started to rethink how I could engage the course material, rather than simply memorize it. It was clear that my old ways had gone extinct. Instead of cramming, I began studying a week before an exam. Instead of expecting to master a skill when the assessment came, I sought feedback on my progress weeks before the assessment in order to improve. After implementing these new strategies, I not only earned A's again, but I was able to gain life-long learning skills.

I now have the knowledge and mastery of skills to succeed in college. Now that I recognize the true learning process, I have the power to continue to strive for success. When I took Biology in high school, I was fascinated by being able to develop an in-depth understanding of our bodies and the world around us. Biology allowed me to think critically and to see beyond the surface. Specifically, I enjoyed having the opportunity to apply my knowledge in labs by generating hypotheses



and testing them. I'm looking forward to taking advantage of your resources to participate in research and prepare for a career as an anesthesiologist.

I aspire to be an anesthesiologist because I hope to help people ease their fears and pain when going into surgery. I recognize that becoming an anesthesiologist is a difficult task, but thanks to lessons I've learned, I'm excited to overcome challenges thrown my way the same way I overcame my struggles in ELA class. Facing that challenge, and discovering the power of learning, helped me grow immensely. Truthfully, there will always be fireworks and confetti in my head at the sight of an A, but I now recognize that the learning is far more lasting than an A.